

Served: December
5, 1997



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Issued by the Department of Transportation
on the 1st day of December, 1997

Ninety-day notice of intent of

CONTINENTAL EXPRESS, INC.

to terminate service at Worcester, Massachusetts under 49
U.S.C. 41734 and 14 CFR Part 323

Docket OST 97-2540

ORDER ALLOWING SUSPENSION OF SERVICE

On May 19, 1997, Continental Express, Inc., (Continental Express), filed a 90-day notice of its intent to suspend service at Worcester, Massachusetts, effective September 4, 1997. Continental Express subsequently amended its suspension date to January 7, 1998. Continental Express filed notice pursuant to the Department's "one-third" rule: 14 CFR section 323.3(a)(5) of the Department's Aviation Economic Regulations requires carriers to file a 90-day notice if their proposed suspension of service would reduce the total number of passenger seats linking the affected community to Federal Aviation Administration-designated hubs by 33 percent or more.

Worcester's essential air service determination, as last established by Order 84-5-86, May 25, 1984, requires at least two daily nonstop round trips to New York, providing a minimum of 62 seats in each direction. (See Appendix for map.)

At the time Continental Express filed its suspension notice, the carrier operated three nonstop round trips a day between Worcester and New York's Newark Airport using 50-seat ATR and 30-seat Embraer Brasilia aircraft. In addition to Continental Express, scheduled service is provided by US Airways Express, which operates four nonstop round trips a day to New York's LaGuardia Airport, and five nonstop round trips a day to Philadelphia, using 19-seat Beech 1900 aircraft.

After reviewing this matter, we have decided to allow Continental Express to suspend service at Worcester as proposed. In an effort to ensure that funds would be spent only for isolated communities, the Department is precluded from paying subsidy at communities that are within 70 highway miles of an FAA-designated medium or large hub. Logan International Airport, a large hub in Boston, Massachusetts, is only about 50 highway miles from Worcester. Bradley International Airport, a medium hub in Hartford, Connecticut, is only about 65 highway miles from Worcester. The community's proximity to either of those airports precludes the Department from paying subsidy support for Continental Express's service. Thus, we may not compel Continental to continue to serve Worcester.

On a more optimistic note, we are well aware of the community's major efforts to promote their local airport, and we would hope that if demand for air service at Worcester is sufficient, US Airways Express may decide, as a matter of self-interest, to increase service there in response to Continental Express's withdrawal, or another carrier may elect to inaugurate service at Worcester.

As a final matter, before Continental Express suspends service, we expect it to contact all passengers holding reservations for flights that will be suspended, to inform them of the suspension and the availability of existing service provided by US Airways Express, and to assist them in arranging alternative transportation.

This order is issued under authority delegated in 49 CFR 1.56(i).

ACCORDINGLY,

1. We take no action to prohibit Continental Express, Inc., from suspending service at Worcester, Massachusetts, effective January 7, 1998;
2. We will rely on US Airways Express to provide essential air service at Worcester, Massachusetts; and
3. We will serve a copy of this order on the Mayor and airport manager of Worcester, Massachusetts; the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission; and US Airways Express.

By:

CHARLES A. HUNNICUTT
Assistant Secretary for Aviation
and International Affairs

(SEAL)

*An electronic version of this document is available on the World Wide Web at
<http://www.dms.dot.gov/general/orders/aviation.html>
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